

NGO Shadow Report - Austria: Perspectives by Women with Refugee and Migration Biographies on the Implementation of CEDAW in Austria

Participatory NGO Coalition Report as Part of Austria's 10th Review Cycle under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

For the first time, the contributions and claims within this report

- were written by women with refugee and migration biographies themselves, as part of participatory workshops,
- reveal the perspectives of these women, whose vulnerable situation has been brought up by the UN expert committee during the previous review cycle,
- compile the practical knowledge of experts - namely those affected - about which measures are needed for a comprehensive implementation of the rights of CEDAW in Austria.



Prologue: Working Methods and Key Findings

Klagsverband (Austrian Litigation Association of NGOs Against Discrimination)

This shadow report is an NGO coalition report as part of Austria's 10th review cycle under the CEDAW Convention, with a focus on refugee women and women with migration biographies.

In the last review cycle on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention in Austria (CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9) and in the current List of Issues (CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10), the UN Committee addressed a number of intersectional issues relating to the rights of refugee women and women with migration biographies in Austria.

These women experience multifaceted social marginalization, which is also reflected in their lack of representation in media and political discourse. The CEDAW state review offers an opportunity to hear the voices of refugee women and women with migration biographies and makes their perspectives visible. In this report, women from this vulnerable group are the focus for the first time, speaking for themselves and contributing their experiential knowledge to the country review. Organized according to key topics, the women formulated claims and demands regarding measures necessary to enable them to fully enjoy their rights under the CEDAW Convention.

The report was coordinated by Klagsverband. Five member organizations of Klagsverband, which work with refugee women and women with migration biographies in various contexts (e.g., through general counseling centers, counseling centers for sex workers or victims of trafficking in women, basic education courses, preparatory courses for the labor market, or exchange groups), worked together with women's groups in participatory workshops to produce the contributions to this report on the key topics of "equality and participation," "paid work and care work, social security", "education", "health and self-determination", and "protection from violence and exploitation." Three of the organizations are based in Vienna, while two are located in other federal states. This also highlights specific regional challenges in more rural areas.

Methods

The workshops took place over a period of five months (February to June 2025) and were conducted with different groups of women, some of which already existed (e.g., participants in a basic education course or an exchange group) and some of which were formed specifically for the project. Participation in the workshops was voluntary; participants received an expense allowance of between €30 and €100 per person for their time.

The workshops, each with 5-25 participants, were attended by women from a wide variety of countries and age groups. Some participants had only recently arrived in Austria (e.g., asylum seekers), while others had been living in Austria for some time. Together with the workshop leaders, they discussed their rights and the associated challenges and implementation deficits, with the support of interpreters where necessary. Various participatory methods were used in the workshops: The main topics were discussed using

images, comics, or podcasts as stimuli, as well as handmade mind maps or collages in line with the Expressive Arts Method. Participants worked on the texts and claims in groups or writing workshops. The demands were weighed using, among others, the systemic consensus method. The diversity of the topics and participants is reflected in the different concepts of the contributions. Intersectional concerns based on gender, age, country of origin, residence status, and the interrelationships between racism and religion-based discrimination became apparent.

Findings

Despite their different backgrounds and biographies, many of the women shared experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion, as reflected in the claims they formulated together. The most significant problem areas were common to almost all of the contributions: Women lack access to adequate education and training, sufficient and free childcare as well as low-threshold access to information to establish themselves in Austria. Moreover, many women experience discrimination on the labor market and in healthcare, which is detrimental to their economic independence, their personal development, and their physical and mental health.

The women viewed the participatory workshops and the opportunity to contribute their perspectives and demands to an official state review process as thoroughly positive and empowering. The joint work on the shadow report thus also served to communicate the rights enshrined in CEDAW. Or, as one workshop leader aptly put it: "Formats like this show how much knowledge, experience, and problem-solving skills there are in supposedly 'affected' groups. What is often lacking is not commitment, but the space to be heard."

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Equality and Participation

coordinated by the Dokumentations- und Beratungsstelle

Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus (Documentation and Counselling Center on Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism)

CEDAW Article 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, and 13 lit. c)

Equality

Equality is a major issue in the everyday lives of migrant and Muslim women and encompasses many areas: the labor market, healthcare, and access to goods and services.

Discrimination in the labor market was a topic frequently discussed with the participating migrant and Muslim women. They report discrimination based on their appearance, language, and ethnicity, and state that they are treated unequally compared to other applicants and colleagues in the workplace. Challenges arise during the job search and in the workplace itself. A study by Johannes Kepler University Linz and the IZA concludes that female applicants who wear headscarves have to write four to five times more applications than comparable female applicants without headscarves.¹

In this context, the Ombud for Equal Treatment reports that in 2022/2023, 42% of requests for advice on discrimination in the private sector concerned gender discrimination and 24% were attributable to the ethnic origin of the persons concerned.² Of the 244 consultations conducted by the Ombud for Equal Treatment in 2020/2021, 74% concerned people of Muslim faith, 90% of whom were women, and the discrimination took place particularly in the workplace.³ In its 2024 annual report, the Documentation and Counselling Center on Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism once again documented that discrimination particularly affects women, especially those who are visibly Muslim.⁴

This pattern also extends to other areas of life, such as healthcare and access to goods and services. During the workshops, the women reported that they were not taken seriously during medical treatment and that their questions were not answered. The 2019 SORA study by the Chamber of Labor found that women with a migration biography experience discrimination in the healthcare sector more often than women without a migration biography. 14% of the women surveyed reported discrimination in healthcare, with Muslim women disproportionately affected at 81%.⁵ Another frequently mentioned example was swimming in a full-body swimsuit, as house rules often prohibit this and thus deny access to the pool or cause fear of possible expulsion. Just recently, Klagsverband

¹ https://docs.iza.org/dp10217.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com (8/6/2025)

² [Gleichbehandlungsbericht für die Privatwirtschaft 2022 und 2023 Teil II – Anwaltschaft für Gleichbehandlung](#), (8/6/2025)

³ <https://www.klagsverband.at/archives/19224#> (8/6/2025)

⁴ <https://dokustelle.at/reports/dokustelle-report-2024> (8/6/2025)

⁵ Schönherr, D. (2021). *Diskriminierungserfahrungen von Frauen in Österreich. Sonderauswertung der Studie „Diskriminierungserfahrungen in Österreich“*. ISBN: 978-3-7063-0830-4

fought a landmark court ruling that found discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and gender in such a case.⁶

Labor Market and Intersectionality

Supporting migrant and Muslim women in Austria requires intersectionality as an analytical tool to highlight overlapping forms of discrimination. In this context, it is important to analyze access to the labor market not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of other characteristics such as migration history, socioeconomic status, education, and age. It is particularly important to empower and support disadvantaged women.

The women reported on the difficulty of balancing paid work and care work. One of the challenges is that there is no entitlement to full-time childcare prior to employment. They also talked about their experiences of taking jobs for which they are overqualified because they fear financial hardship. Research on this topic reports that 50% to 60% of refugee women are employed in underchallenging jobs.⁷ The women mentioned in the interviews that underpaid jobs have a negative impact on their pension claims and that they have to live in constant economic uncertainty as a result.

Participation and Representation of Women in Society and Politics

In the Austrian Parliament, only about 7% of the members of the National Council have a migration biography⁸, which is far below the proportion of people with a migration biography in the total population of around 27%⁹. This puts Austria far behind other European countries.

The recently published Repchance Europe study compares data in Europe and shows that the proportion of members of parliament with migration biographies is 11.6% in Germany, 19% in the Netherlands, 15% in the United Kingdom, and 14% in Switzerland.¹⁰

During the workshops, a frequent question was who represents women's interests in political decisions when women with migration biographies are not represented in politics. Representation helps to stand up for and politically support the realities of life for many people. The increasingly right-wing rhetoric has an impact on the realities of life for many migrants and Muslims in Austria and increasingly reinforces stereotypical and racist narratives.

Politics has direct influence on the institutions and structures that make it difficult for women wearing headscarves to access education or provide less funding for migrant civil society organizations. Political representation has a major impact on initiatives and associations that are in contact with migrant women and promote knowledge transfer.

⁶ [Klagsverband erwirkt Gerichtsurteil gegen sexistische Bekleidungsvorschriften für Frauen in Bädern – Klagsverband](#) (8/6/2025)

⁷ [Refugees' Integration into the Austrian Labour Market: Dynamics of Occupational Mobility and Job-Skills Mismatch](#) (8/6/2025)

⁸ [Neue Abgeordnete: Weniger Frauen als Neulinge im Parlament – Parlament – derStandard.at › Inland](#) (8/6/2025)

⁹ [Jede vierte Person in Österreich hat einen Migrationshintergrund](#) (8/6/2025)

¹⁰ <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/2025-03/RepchanceEuropeFinal.pdf> (8/6/2025)

There is a great need for knowledge transfer and accessible information on the legal situation regarding women's rights and opportunities for self-determined participation and orientation in everyday life.

Claims:

→ Improving access to information about the recognition of foreign qualifications and measures to promote integration of skilled professionals with foreign degrees, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 g and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 17 g.

→ Obliging employers to offer fair salaries when hiring women, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 a and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 17 a, and to raise awareness that women often ask for less out of fear of rejection.

→ Creating more opportunities for women to change careers to increase their professional flexibility and opportunities.

→ Providing needs-based, free full-day childcare for children of unemployed mothers and mothers in precarious employment, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 b and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 19.

→ Making the pension system structurally equitable, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 37 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 22: Women with interrupted careers and multiple jobs must not be disadvantaged.

→ Mandatory training for medical personnel in intercultural competence and gender-sensitive communication, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 35 f and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 18 g: Female patients must not be disadvantaged based on their looks, their origin, and their beliefs.

→ Structural measures to support clubs and sports programs tailored to the needs of women with refugee and migration biographies.

→ Swimming facilities for women who require separate spaces for religious or cultural reasons (e.g., women-only swimming).

→ Improving educational programs on discrimination, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 3 in order to better inform mothers about health, education, and legal issues.

→ Strengthening the political representation of women with a migration biography in parliament, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 27 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 6 a and 13.

→ Role modelling on a political level: A clear and consistent stance against racist and inhumane narratives by the government and political leaders.

Paid Work and Care Work, Social Security

coordinated by ZEBRA - Intercultural Counselling and Therapy Centre

CEDAW Article 3, 5, 10.11, 12, 13, and 14

Paid Work

Finding paid work is very difficult for women who migrated or fled to Austria. The obstacles most frequently cited by women are: lack of German skills, inadequate childcare facilities, and discrimination.

Learning German is difficult for different reasons. For women refugees, the following applies: During asylum proceedings, only refugees from countries with high prospects of staying in Austria (in recent years, this has only been one country) have access to free German courses, and only up to level A1. Whether language courses are financed by the public sector depends on the type of residence permit. If a language course has to be paid for privately, the household income is not always sufficient, or it is not always a priority. Particularly in rural areas, the range of German courses is limited, and a lack of mobility adds to the difficulty. A lack of German skills is an obstacle when finding work, a reason for not being accepted, and a barrier to get in touch with Austrian society—and to building networks that could help to find employment.

The lack of childcare, or childcare that is limited in time or subject to fees, makes it difficult to attend German courses and is a major hurdle when looking for work and pursuing employment. Kindergarten and nursery spots are scarce in some municipalities and, with the exception of the compulsory year, are subject to fees (with funding options that are, however, sometimes insufficient). As a rule, afternoon care at schools must be paid for. The free and sufficient availability of both forms of childcare would make it easier for women to enter the labor market.

Women cite discrimination based on religion (e.g., wearing a headscarf) and origin (e.g., limited knowledge of German) as a major obstacle in finding work.

Other challenges women face when looking for work include a lack of accessible information on job and training opportunities, bureaucratic hurdles in getting a foreign degree recognized, and—for asylum seekers—remote asylum accommodations and the need for a work permit (which interested employers must apply for).

Care Work

According to their own statements, women are responsible for care work to a greater extent than their husbands: If someone in the family is employed, it is usually the man; unpaid care work is the woman's responsibility. Many women are familiar with this division of roles from their home countries, but they notice that things can be different in Austria. This results in dissatisfaction with this situation among some women.

Care work tends to be more complicated for women than in their country of origin, e.g. – in addition to inadequate childcare – due to a lack of networks to support childcare or a lack

of mobility. A lack of German skills also makes care work more difficult; challenges mentioned here include supporting children with school matters or taking children to the doctor.

Social Security

The financial situation of many women and families is particularly precarious during their asylum proceedings: Each month, a person housed in asylum accommodation receives €195 (plus accommodation and health insurance, as well as clothing assistance of up to €150 per year, school supplies of up to €200 per year, and travel expenses for attending school). The basic benefit, which is also received by persons entitled to subsidiary protection in the relevant federal state, is thus well below the poverty risk threshold (€1,572 per month for a single household in 2023¹¹), and there are no additional benefits such as family allowance or childcare allowance during maternity leave for recipients. This exacerbates many of the obstacles mentioned above (childcare, mobility).

Women also point out their limited access to the healthcare system: Their German skills are often not sufficient to communicate with doctors, and yet interpreting services are only provided occasionally, and only in hospitals. This support is not guaranteed in a regular doctor's office.

The above-mentioned obstacles to employment also mean that many women will have no or very low pension entitlements. This will result in poverty in old age and/or dependence on other family members. With regard to pensions, as in many other areas of the social security system, the following applies: Refugee and immigrant women lack access to information (with regard to the healthcare system, e.g., regarding prescription fee exemptions or nationwide telephone health counseling).

Claims:

- Free or low-cost German language courses for all, including asylum seekers, regardless of origin or prospects of remaining in the country (regional, on several weekdays, with childcare, and beyond A1), thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 31 f and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 16.
- Free or affordable childcare (nursery spots, kindergarten spots, and after-school care), thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 b and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 19.
- Measures tackling the discrimination against immigrant and refugee women in the labor market, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 paras. 19 a and 33 g and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 6 and 17 g.
- Interpreting services in the healthcare system.
- Courses for new parents, e.g. education on the equitable distribution of care work, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 21 a and b and para. 33 e as well as CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 7.

¹¹ Statistik Austria: [Tabellenband_EUSILC_2023.pdf](#) (8/5/2025)

→ Low-threshold access to information, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 3 regarding

- employment and training opportunities as well as opportunities for voluntary employment;
- healthcare system, school system, social system;
- residence permits and citizenship.

Education

coordinated by Verein Projekt Integrationshaus

CEDAW Articles 3, 5, 10, and 11

Statistics are regularly published showing that immigrant and refugee women face major obstacles in gaining a (sustainable) foothold in the Austrian labor market.¹² This is linked to more frequent dropouts from school and training programs among (young) migrants. Structural and individual discrimination¹³ are the main causes: Where can leverage be applied to counteract this? What improvements are the experts, i.e. those affected themselves, calling for?

German Classes, Studying, School

The women agreed: German is “not a must to live in Austria, but quality of life is better”.

Almost all schools and educational institutions, and the assessment systems used therein, assume that German is the first language. Teachers are needed who are qualified to work in super-diverse¹⁴ classes and who recognize and utilize multilingualism as a resource. A differentiated approach to multilingualism can be promoted through a broader range of educational formats and content in languages other than German and English, and through teachers who are multilingual themselves.

Linking residence permits to language certificates exacerbates educational disadvantage (especially for women who have had little or no schooling due to war and displacement) and creates psychological and financial pressure. The language tests administered by the Austrian Integration Fund, which must be passed in order to obtain a residence permit, are perceived as difficult and incomprehensible, and the assessments as non-transparent. Accessing exam results is complicated, and it is not possible to pass only part of the exam (unlike other internationally recognized language exams).

Vocational Training, Career Entry, Work

Suitable trainee positions with financial security for people who do not speak German as their first language are needed, and more opportunities for single parents (e.g. through flexible childcare) as well as German courses in the workplace.

¹² <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/statistiken/>, Kapitel Arbeitslose und in Schulung befindliche Asylberechtigte und subsidiär Schutzberechtigte; Statistische Jahrbücher „Migration und Integration“, Erwerbsquote nach Geschlecht und Migrationshintergrund, Struktur der Erwerbstätigkeit (Bildungshintergrund) und Arbeitslosenquote nach Geschlecht und Staatsbürgerschaft (6/30/2025)

¹³ Structural discrimination: Schools, other educational institutions, and the assessment systems used there are all based on the assumption that German is the first language. Residence permits and, in some parts of Austria, access to subsidized housing is linked to language certificates, which in turn place educationally disadvantaged individuals at an additional disadvantage and significantly increase the financial and psychological pressure on newly arrived individuals to secure their livelihood. Individual discrimination: Participants often report that they are treated poorly in the context of school, employment services, healthcare, or the police, and that their ability to learn and make independent decisions is particularly questioned.

¹⁴ See the definition of the term here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superdiversity> (6/30/2025)

Women often feel that they are not sufficiently informed or are informed too late, either about training opportunities for themselves or about the specific choices and expectations for children when they start school. They want to know more about different professions and the associated earning and development opportunities. The employment service and social welfare authorities in particular put pressure on them to find work quickly, often in the low-wage sector. Many women who wear headscarves report that they are denied opportunities for good jobs. They all want to be able to make more informed decisions about their career and find “training programs that are fun” and lead to success and personal growth.

The division of care work and flexible working arrangements was identified as essential for the work context. Participants emphasized how important the aspect of social participation while working is to them. It is difficult to meet people outside their community and make new friends. They experience their environment as a “closed society” and call for this issue to be discussed more broadly. They want contact points that advise women, regardless of their origin, residence status, and family situation, on how they can better assert their needs and demands in the family and at work so to strengthen their financial and legal independence.

Education as a key part for participation and prevention of violence

Safety, protection from violence, and less stress “both outside and inside” (where “inside” refers to families, courses, and workplaces, and “outside” refers to public spaces) are essential for women. They experience discrimination in all areas of life. They call for greater participation by immigrant women, especially in publicly visible professions such as healthcare, the police, the judiciary, and politics, in leadership positions, and as company founders.

The needs of migrants and refugee women for safety and protection from violence should be addressed through participatory neighborhood work and jointly developed preventive concepts among other examples. Dealing with diversity and training in communication that avoids discrimination and raises awareness of multilingualism should be anchored in all forms of vocational training. In addition, there should be awareness-raising campaigns in which immigrant women are made visible as successful and self-confident.

The women demand “more” than German language courses and vocational training, i.e. educational opportunities for migrants that focus on personal development. “I am proud of myself as a mother who wants to complete her education, and despite many obstacles, I want to share this experience of developing a plan and starting to implement it.” More health education is also important.

The participants felt that there was a lack of professional, holistic, and resource-oriented counselling available to people from the day they arrived in Austria. Many participants reported that they had lost a lot of time.

Sufficient, easily accessible, reliable childcare and affordable, secure housing are further demands that support women's participation in education and work.

Statement resulting from the workshops

The right to education and work in Austria is implemented once all women living here can safely and confidently follow their chosen path. They can provide for their children and are supported by adequate financial security, family, and friends.

They can learn and study in different languages, advance professionally, take breaks and holidays, and take care of their health. They do not have to fear violence. Their skills and resources are recognized and respected. Their qualifications are acknowledged. Solidarity and the visibility of successful women with equal rights from all population groups are an important driving force for the implementation of these rights and are promoted in training courses and high-profile campaigns.

Claims:

- Embedding gender and diversity skills in the training of all educational professionals, healthcare professionals, the police and judiciary, thus, among others, implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9, para. 11 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10, para. 16.
- Designing language assessments that are relevant for obtaining residence permits in a transparent and internationally comparable manner.
- Improving access to vocational training that includes childcare for women with a first language other than German; more options for personal development and health-related training.
- Accessible, resource-oriented, multilingual counseling about education and the labor market from the beginning, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 3.
- Rapidly providing sufficient childcare spots, even before mothers enter the labor market, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 19.
- Taking measures against violence and for safety in public and private spaces, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 23 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 9, 10, and 19; and developing said measures together with women migrants and women refugees.
- Training programs and public campaigns implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 paras. 19 and 27 c and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 6 and 13, leading to more migrants in public professions such as the police, the judiciary, senior positions in the healthcare system, business start-ups, and politics. The headscarf should not be an issue.
- Providing affordable housing for immigrants, without waiting periods or language certificates.
- Raising awareness of our super-diverse society, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 21 c and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 7, working

together to combat discriminatory structures through public awareness campaigns and sharing success stories.

Health and Self-determination

coordinated by maiz – Autonomes Zentrum von und für Migrant*innen
(Autonomous center by and for migrants)

CEDAW Articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 12

Health and self-determination are closely related and mutually dependent topics - the more autonomous women^{*15} and their relationships, their lifestyle, the choice of their employment, and their free time are, the better their mental and physical health.

“Austria is no country for migrants.”¹⁶

The freedom to make self-determined decisions about one’s own life is limited particularly for migrant women* in Austria, by way of racist legislation characterized by restrictive migration policies, unequal treatment, discrimination, and social exclusion. This restriction of self-determination has a tangible impact, for instance restricted access to basic rights (i.e. housing subsidies), and it comes with considerable consequences for physical and mental health. Many women* have shared their dreams and desires about their professional future, but they are unable to pursue them, due to - not only - structural barriers. BIWoC (Black and Indigenous Women of Color) report numerous situations in which they have experienced discrimination, and in which they were denied access to education and employment. Wearing a headscarf exacerbates racist discrimination on all levels.

There are not enough free German language courses, nor spots in childcare facilities. Moreover, migrant women* often lack the economic perspective to pursue their desired education, as financial support is often non-existent or tied to conditions such as pre-qualifying periods, which often excludes them.

When it comes to family life, self-determination is often restricted, too. Regulations on family reunification, which are subject to strict conditions such as high income requirements, mean that women* are separated from their children, spouses, and relatives. Single mothers* are often unable to meet the income requirements to bring their spouses to join them. This means that women* have to handle household, childcare etc. on their own, which frequently exacerbates precarious situations. For women* who want to reunite with their children and bring them to Austria, these conditions may mean that they are forced to stay in abusive relationships and marriages, because they depend on their spouse’s income. Obtaining Austrian citizenship is also tied to strict criteria, such as German language certificates and huge financial expenses - and the same applies to the renewal of residence permits.

Restrictive migration politics thus poses an obstacle to self-determination, reinforces dependencies and harms women* in particular.

¹⁵By adding the asterisk after the word “women”, we want to draw attention to the fact that gender categories are constructs.

¹⁶Text in italics is directly quoted from one of the participants in the workshops.

“The system makes us sick, because it’s discriminatory.”

Even when it comes to how they spend their free time, women* frequently experience discrimination based on their headscarves, the color of their skin, or their attribution as migrants. Hostility in public spaces, harassment while playing sports or going for walks, and exclusion while swimming are all part of the reports. This means a significant restriction in how free time can be spent.

The constant stress caused by discrimination, racism, exclusion, isolation, and restrictive migration policies in Austria has an impact on physical and mental health. Some women* reported that they are constantly discriminated against by authorities and that their personal decisions and opinions regarding their private lives are not considered. They are, for example required to present documents that other people need not present for the same request. They have to fight to be heard. Some do not have any relatives in Austria and are left to fend for themselves. They are missing support and understanding by the Austrian society.

“I want more support, more therapy options, better treatment. Discrimination affects our mental health, and there are so few therapy options. I want us not to feel like we are alone.”

There is also a lot of negative experience with physicians and the Austrian healthcare system. According to reports, people with financial resources stand a significantly better chance at adequate treatment. Whoever doesn’t have the money for a private doctor, has to wait for months to get an appointment or is unable to find an available doctor in the first place. There are also reports of numerous cases of racist behavior by medical professionals. One woman who works as a sex worker does not reveal her employment to physicians because she does not want to be confronted with prejudice, voyeurism, and discrimination.

Sex workers are generally victimized when it comes to their choice of employment. They are exposed to discrimination, stigmatization, and structural violence due to their professional activities. In Austria, sex workers must undergo a mandatory medical check-up, during which they are tested for STDs - but a medical examination is not performed.

“This is not about supporting or helping us. It’s about control.”

These check-ups frequently come with disrespectful and condescending behavior - especially towards trans and migrant sex workers. Police officers and government officials repeatedly misgender trans women*. Even though the medical check-up is mandatory for sex workers in Austria to be able to work legally, trans women* are often insulted or refused treatment by doctors.

“We are the women who are here and who are experiencing all this. We should be asked and involved!”*

Our realities of life may differ amongst migrants, sex workers, single parents, Muslims, trans; but we are united in our battles:

“We want the same rights as Austrian women: living without fear, being safe.*

We want self-determination - always and everywhere!”

Claims:

- A stop to restrictive, discriminating migration policies.
- Easier access to Austrian citizenship in implementation of CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9, para. 29 a and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 14.
- Free choice and financial support for courses, training, and continued education, in implementation, among others, of CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 31 f and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 16.
- Right to a family life, in particular by facilitating the conditions for family reunification, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 43 c.
- Providing free childcare for all, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 b and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 19.
- Effective measures for a non-discriminatory healthcare system, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 35 f and g and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 18 g and h.
- Interpreting services during doctor's visits.
- Access to information about rights, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 3 - not only in German.
- Involving those affected in the drafting of laws.
- Measures towards leisure time free of discrimination, without being stared at, harassed, or discriminated. Providing public spaces available for and belonging to all.
- Free-of-charge, anonymous treatment and examination options instead of the current discriminatory mandatory medical check-up for sex workers, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 25 g and CEDAW/C/AUT/10 para. 12.
- Consequences in case of transphobia.
- Consequences in case of discrimination based on the wearing of a headscarf. Right to wear a headscarf in the workplace, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 19 a and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/para. 6.
- Providing free therapy in languages other than German.
- Providing supportive structures in cases of any form of violence, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 23 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 9, 10, and 19.
- A clear commitment by Austria to anti-discrimination, including in implementation of CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 3.
- A system that protects our health and self-determination instead of making us sick!

Protection Against Violence and Exploitation

coordinated by LEFÖ - Beratung, Bildung und Begleitung für Migrantinnen* (Counselling, education, and support for migrant women*)

CEDAW Articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 12

The issues raised in this report are not abstract demands but based on lived reality and personal experience with violence, exclusion, and systematic deprivation of rights.

The women* who have participated in the creation of this report come from different countries, speak different languages, and belong to very diverse social groups. Despite individual differences, there is shared experience, especially when it comes to structural and racist discrimination, institutional obstacles, and social exclusion. In Austria, in Europe, in a system that often does not see them, does not hear them, and does not protect them.

The CEDAW Convention obliges states to protect women* and girls - regardless of their origin, their residence status, or their affiliation. This protection does not apply equally to everyone. Women* with migration and refugee biographies frequently experience discrimination and exclusion.

These incidents are not isolated cases but reveal structural problems.

"Like a boat, floating across the vast ocean of life.

Curling up inside a snail's house and trying not to get hurt.

Like a butterfly, trying to escape.

Hiding inside yourself.

Being encouraged by family and friends.

Plagued by nostalgia.

Trying to escape.

Crying into a pillow"

"Como un barco a la deriva en el inmenso océano de la vida

Escondido dentro del caparazón de un caracol pasa que no te lastimen

Queriendo escapar como una mariposa

Encondiéndote dentro de una

Animando a la familia y a amigos

Cargado de nostalgia

Tratando de escapar

Llorando con la almohada."

(M.M. Workshop attendee)

These words describe the realities of many women* with migrant and refugee experience in Austria. Feelings of disorientation, of inner withdrawal, and of a yearning for safety. At the same time, they express hope, caring, and resilience. This ambivalence between pain and hope is part of a lived reality.

Those affected by gender-specific violence report that they often lack safe spaces and legal protection. Violence is not only experienced physically and mentally, but also as a structural and institutional phenomenon -through government inaction, economic exclusion, arbitrary actions by authorities, legal invisibility, or lacking access to healthcare.

Despite these challenges, women* are resilient and support each other wherever the state fails them. With informal networks, experience and knowledge exchange, as well as self-organizing, they contribute to social justice. However, this commitment can never replace structural measures - long-term changes are needed.

Women* with migrant or refugee experience frequently experience discrimination and racism - from the authorities, in the healthcare system, and on the labor market. They are confronted with prejudice, exclusion, and stigmatizing labels: “drug addicts”, “terrorists”, “victims”, “unwilling to integrate into society”. This type of structural racism not only hinders effective access to protection measures but also access to social participation.

The issue is further exacerbated by insufficient recognition of language and communication skills. Women* who do not speak German are often perceived as subjects incapable of action and speech. Lacking or insufficient interpreting services make it hard to describe traumatic experiences. The consequences: Retraumatization, isolation, and silence.

Structural barriers also remain in the healthcare sector: Cultural and geographical differences in the perception and description of illnesses and health are often ignored or considered problematic. Mental stress is downplayed or pathologized, which is why depression, PTSD or suicidal thoughts frequently remain untreated.

In addition, many women* with migration and refugee experience live in dependency in terms of their residence status—whether from violent partners or exploitative employers. The fear of losing their residence status prevents many from seeking support. The Austrian asylum system is characterized by uncertainty, and limited access to the labor market and education further exacerbates dependency. Hence, there is constant risk of remaining trapped in a state of permanent powerlessness.

Even highly qualified women* often find their educational qualifications not recognized. Many are forced to take on precarious, low-paid, and underqualified jobs—often without social security. This economic disadvantage increases the risk of exposure to violence and makes it considerably more difficult to build an independent life.

Another obstacle is the lack of access to childcare, especially for single mothers. Without appropriate support, they are denied access to education, employment, and social participation. This is, however, a key factor for self-determination—and thus an effective protection against violence and exploitation.

Women* with migration and refugee experience live in Austria and want to stay. There is an urgent need for action to recognize their realities, respect their rights, and ensure their protection in the long term.

Claims:

- Safe and comprehensive protection from violence and discrimination, regardless of residence status, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 23 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 9, 10 and 19.

- Strengthening specialized counseling and support services for specific groups such as migrant women*, asylum seekers, single women*, and women* with disabilities.
 - Comprehensive, secure, long-term, and affordable housing for women* affected by violence.
- Recognizing structural and institutional violence as a form of gender-based violence and its anchoring in legislation and action plans:
- Implementing mandatory, regular training measures on institutional discrimination, intersectional disadvantage, and anti-racist practices in public authorities, the police, the judiciary, the healthcare system, and educational institutions, thus implementing, among others, CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 11 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 16;
 - Implementing measures against institutional racism and discrimination in public authorities, the healthcare system, the education system, and the labor market, thus implementing, among others, CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 12.
- Legal and practical recognition of all forms of violence:
- Strengthening political and financial support for measures against all forms of violence as defined in the Istanbul Convention;
 - Expanding and providing long-term support for low-threshold violence protection services for all forms of violence;
 - Collecting and evaluating gender-based data, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 1 to enable evidence-based measures against violence.
- Providing multilingual and accessible information on rights and protection options, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 3.
- Expanding professional and independent interpreting services and considering intersectional discrimination in counselling services.
- Access to education and the labor market during asylum proceedings, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 31 f and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 16.
- Simplified recognition of foreign educational qualifications, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 33 g and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 17 g, as well as non-discriminatory access to the labor market.
- Free, full-day childcare, including before entering the workforce, especially for single migrant women*, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 33 b and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 19.

- A non-discriminatory, intersectional, trauma-sensitive healthcare system, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 35 f and g and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 18 g and h.
- Ensuring political and social participation of women* with migration and refugee experience, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 27 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 6 and 13 – not only as a target group, but as experts* of their own realities.
- Reducing gender stereotypes, thus implementing CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 21 and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 para. 7, and mitigating the labeling of migrant women*.
- Ending restrictive migration policies with free access to the labor market and education, as well as reforming residence permits, especially for victims of violence and human trafficking, including in implementation of CEDAW/C/AUT/CO/9 para. 25 c to g and CEDAW/C/AUT/QPR/10 paras. 11 e and 19.